

Guardian Angel

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Summary: Squall and Quistis have a conversation on the journey back from the SeeD exam, and come to an understanding...

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This is about a conversation between Quistis and Squall on the return to Balamb after the SeeD exam.

Rating: G

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His breath was fast, ragged. Every inhalation caused him pain, he thought his lungs were going to burst. His heart was thudding in his chest, and his hair was falling in his eyes. As he ran, he stumbled over an uneven piece of ground, falling to one knee. Behind him, the female member of his team slowed down to help, but he cursed her, telling her in a harsh voice to go on as he got to his feet again. He ran again, the girl in front of him this time. They were crossing a bridge, and he could hear the hideous metal clanking and roaring behind him. The girl turned her face as she heard the screaming metal, and he saw her eyes go wide with terror. It was faster than they were.

"Fight!" yelled Squall Leonhart, as the monster robot leaped in front of them. Selphie Tilmitt stopped where she was, her breath coming in short gasps. She clutched her side in a stitch as she readied her weapon to obey her leader. Zell Dincht paused, and spun around, fists ready. Facing the huge metal beast was difficult, and definitely

nothing ever encountered before on a SeeD exam. If the truth be told, Zell didn't think they were ready to defeat such a...monster.

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Squall flew at the beast, his face set in determination, a look of fury shadowed his fine features. There was a shower of sparks as the cold steel of his gunblade glanced off the shell of the X-ATM092. Selphie let out a little cry as she jumped towards the monster, striking it hard with her shinobou. She shuddered as it aimed its claws towards her, knocking her to the ground as it attacked. Zell, knowing he couldn't do much with his fists, cast a healing spell on Selphie, and then lightning on the monster.

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It visibly weakened, and Squall ran towards it again, raising his sword high in the air as he prepared to strike. He brought it down with a crash, pulling the trigger at exactly the right time. A cloud of flames rose from the monster as it let out a harsh shriek and the engine whirring within it clanked louder. The smell of cordite mixed with blood as the SeeD's resumed running.

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Selphie was slower this time, as she had received a deep cut to her stomach, caused by the monster. Squall could hear her little moans as she ran, clutching at the wound. He could hear his blood pumping, and felt tired. As they neared the beach, he realised he couldn't hear Selphie, but he could hear metal clanking again, in the distance.

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He turned his head while running, and saw the younger girl doubled over, blood dripping from her uniform. He knew what he had to do. He ran back towards her, sweat clouding his vision, and put his arm around Selphie, pulling the weakened girl after him. She struggled, trying to keep up, clutching on to his jacket for support.

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He heard a metallic scream from behind them, and cursed silently as he realised they weren't going to make it to the ship. Zell was already there, and he could see the vessel in the distance. Selphie was gasping from fatigue and pain, but she was still somehow making her legs work. His own legs felt numb as he ran. Putting in his last bit of effort, he gripped Selphie tighter and the pair ran as fast as they could towards the vessel.

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Squall shoved Selphie towards the waiting SeeD's and turned to face the monster. He faintly heard Quistis yelling for him to get out of the way, and confused he turned back to the ship. She was standing there with the machine gun each vessel was equipped with, cold determination glittering in her icy blue eyes. Squall leapt out of the way as she let rip with a hail of bullets from the machine gun. He ran inside the vehicle, glancing back at the smoking wreckage which had pursued them. Quistis breathed in deeply and stepped away from the gun, feeling exhausted. The kickback from the weapon made it hard for the slender woman to use. She turned to her favourite student, smiling weakly at him as he half sat, half lay on the padded bench inside the vessel.

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"You did very well." she complimented him. He did not smile at her, but gazed back into her eyes. Quistis felt uncomfortable as she met his slate grey stare. It was as if he could look right into her, as if her soul was laid bare for him. And nothing in it could impress him.

She broke away from his stony gaze, and sat next to him, offering a potion. He took it, almost gratefully. She didn't expect him to be thankful, or gracious about it.

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That was just Squall. Emotionless. It amazed her. How could someone be so cold...so arctic, on the verge of rudeness. She knew Zell had felt snubbed when Squall refused to shake his hand, but that was just a little thing. Sometimes, Squall could completely blank out another person, as if they simply weren't there.

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"Do you feel alright?" she asked him quietly, trying to steady her voice. She still felt butterflies in her stomach when she spoke to him. She was sitting so close...

"Fine." he replied. Her heart sank a little. He turned his face away from her, making no effort to hide how uncomfortable she was making him feel. She attempted a smile.

"I..saw what you did for Selphie. It was very brave." she said in a low voice. He stared at her.

"She'd have died if I hadn't gone back for her. I took over the leader's responsibilities. I didn't have a choice. I was just doing my job." he replied harshly. Quistis felt like giving up.

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"Squall, what is it? I'm trying to make an effort to understand you. You're my student. I need to know if anything is bothering you." she said, exasperated.

Squall sighed impatiently."I don't want to talk." he said. He stood up, and walked towards the back of the vessel, where Selphie was lying on a stretcher, two SeeD's working on the deep cut to her stomach.

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She smiled weakly at Squall, and mouthed the word 'thanks' at him. She looked pale and tired, but he felt the same. It had been terrifying. Now the adrenaline was wearing off..he felt a dull ache in his stomach, as if he had been kicked. He was glad he had saved Selphie. He wouldn't have been able to bear the guilt if he had left her behind.

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He turned back to Quistis, and his hard expression softened as he saw her. She was sitting where he had left her, staring down at her hands folded in her lap. She looked very sad, and he felt bad for being so hard on her. A part of him knew she cared for him, but he knew it wasn't right. She was his teacher, she wasn't allowed to have feelings for him. All the same, he didn't want to isolate her.

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He crossed over back to her. "Quistis?" he said, his voice deep. Quistis looked up at him, brushing away a strand of blonde hair from her eyes. She looked innocent, and very young. He guessed she was not more than two or three years older than him. He was wrong in his estimate, in reality she was only a few months older than him. He gazed at her. He was surprised to see bitterness in the return stare.

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"Quistis, I didn't mean....I'm just tired, that's all." he said, not used to apologising. She sighed. "It doesn't matter," she shrugged. But he got the impression that it mattered a lot.

He looked down. There was blood on his uniform, and he wiped at it in disgust. It was Selphie's blood, not his, but it brought back the memories of battle, and made his heart beat faster. He looked up again, at Quistis. She was sitting stiffly, her face turned away from him. He rightly guessed he had hurt her.

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"Look, I'm sorry," he said. He sighed, knowing what she felt when she tried talking to him. She shook her head, and turned back to him.

"It's ok." she said softly. But her face told him different. The usual smile she wore when speaking to him, half teasingly, half friendly, was replaced by a look of indifference. He suddenly felt cold, as if he had lost a friend.

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He decided to actually try and tell her how he felt.

"Quistis...I..feel awkward talking to you," he said honestly. Her expression changed slightly, but she looked pained. "I...you're my instructor. I don't know who you want me to be, but I don't think I can. What I'm trying to say is...."

"You don't have any feelings for me." she said flatly. He felt lost. He was angry at her for putting him in this position, but something stopped him from showing this. Somehow, Squall was aware of how delicate this subject was.

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"That's not it. I just..I really don't know what to say to. You are my instructor. I respect you, but I know as well as you do that it is impossible for us to have a relationship. And, I don't want to have a relationship with you. Not in the way you want it." he said, trying to keep his voice even.

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She nodded, and swallowed, unable to speak. He continued.

"We can be friends.....is that what you want?" he said. It was a big thing for him. Squall had spent his whole life alone, and to have someone who wanted to get close to him...it felt strange. Quistis smiled.

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"That's all I ever wanted. I just want to understand my student a little more." she said. They both knew she was lying, but it would rest for now. They sat in silence for a little while. As usual, Squall's appearance was the opposite to what was going on the inside. His thoughts were racing. He had asked Quistis to be his friend. Was she going to cling to him now? He couldn't bear that. It would be like Seifer and his two pet lap dogs, Fujin and Raijin.

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But Quistis wouldn't. She was very independent, Squall knew that. He paused in his thought, wondering why he knew that...of course, they had been in the same class for a couple of years. How could he have forgotten? An image flashed into his head of Quistis when she was younger. She must have been about twelve years old....

She was breaking up him and Seifer, who had been fighting in the training centre. Squall remembered the angry tears which had sprung to his eyes as Seifer attacked him with the gunblade, after knocking Squall's own out of his hands.

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Squall had been cut on his shoulder, dangerously close to his neck, and the depth of the cut would have been fatal to the child had it fallen just a couple of inches higher. Xu, then only about fifteen, had run in to take Seifer away for punishment, and Dr Kadowaki had come to take Squall to the infirmary. He remembered looking at Quistis over his shoulder. It wasn't the first time she had helped him, but this instance stuck in his mind, as the brave girl had almost thrown herself in front of Seifer's gunblade to prevent him killing Squall. Her face stuck in his mind.

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Her innocent sky blue eyes were misted with tears, her bottom lip trembling as she watched him being taken away. She had her hair in two long blonde plaits, and as she stood there, a pale, thin child, in a cadet's uniform too big for her diminutive frame, he had felt a connection to her.

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She was like his guardian angel.

"Guardian angel?" he whispered to himself. Quistis looked to him, a tiny smile on her lips.

"What did you say?" she asked him. He shook his head.

"Do you remember when we were twelve....I had a fight with Seifer. We had only just got our weapons, and wanted to try them out...you..."

"I saved you," she finished for him with a smile, remembering. He nodded.

"You...threw yourself in front of me. Seifer wouldn't attack you, you knew that. You saved my life, as I couldn't defend myself." he told her. She smiled, trying to remember.

"There were a lot of fights like that. Seifer was out of control...still is," she said, the smile leaving her face as she

wondered where the leader of Squad B had gone now. Squall nodded.

"Yes. But...I want to thank you. You didn't have to do it. I was too proud to admit it...but sometimes I did need your help. Seifer would have driven me crazy otherwise." he admitted. She

put her hand on his.

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"It's alright. I did it because Seifer was wrong. He taunted you, and you....you were too stubborn, and proud to turn down a challenge. Even if you nearly got yourself killed. God, at twelve years old you and Seifer were almost the best fighters Garden had!" she laughed. Squall smiled.

"Yes, well we did get a lot of practice trying to kill each other." he said. She laughed.

"Mmm...yeah. I'm surprised you remember. I had forgotten that." she said, a shadow of confusion crossed her pretty face. Squall frowned.

"Yeah....me too. I'd forgotten that we were in the same class, for two years...I think you used to sit in front of me.." he said, trying hard to remember.

"We were in the same class? Oh, of course!" she said, blushing. It was then she had first had a crush on him. When they were working together on a project. They had been thirteen, and Quistis was worried about her weight, spots, greasy hair and clumsiness like most of the other adolescent students, but all that had seemed to pass Squall by. He remained fresh faced, and although he grew taller, he never seemed to go through an awkward, gangly phase like the rest of the boys.

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Quistis had had a major crush on him, like most of her friends. He was the only boy in their class who wasn't spotty, too tall or too short, and wasn't a geek. When she had been asked to work with him on a project, she had been embarrassed to say the least. Even now, she felt the familiar butterflies in her stomach when she spoke to him, and it was now five years later. Sadly, she remembered how he hadn't noticed her. They had worked with another girl...Quistis couldn't remember who, but Squall had practically ignored both of them. He got on with the work assigned silently, never discussing it with his group, or helping them in any way.

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Sighing, she turned back to him. Well, they were almost adults now. All the embarrassment and awkwardness was in the past. Hopefully. She smiled at him. Out of the window, she could see the shoreline of Balamb approaching slowly. Squall was tired. He would be glad to be back in his room in the dormitories.

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"Quistis?" he said quietly. She turned her head towards him silently. "Do you remember when we were working on that project? Me, you and...Fujin?" he asked. She gasped. Yes, it had been Fujin. She was had been even smaller and thinner than Quistis. She was an albino,

but no-one ever teased her. They were too scared of Fujin Athen. Smiling at the memory, Quistis turned back to Squall. He too was smiling softly, staring down, lost in half-forgotten memories. Suddenly, the future looked a lot brighter.

She knew she'd never be the one for him, but she was content to be what he saw her as. His Guardian Angel.

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The End.

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_Authors Note: I think Quistis was treated very unfairly in FFVIII, she obviously loved Squall as much, if not more than Rinoa, but she was shunned by him and never given a happy ending, like the others. She lost her instructors license, lost Squall, and had to watch Squall fall in love with Rinoa. Zell had the girl with the pigtails, Selphie and Irvine had each other, Squall had Rinoa. Everyone happy except poor Instructor Trepe. _

_I think she deserves some happiness, as she was just as important a character as the others. And I believe she was lying when she said she was only trying to take Ellone's place. I think she still loves Squall, she just forces herself to hide it. _

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What did you think? Send comments, suggestions or insults, to
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